CLASSICAL DANCE POSES OF INDIA

NATANA NIKETAN PUBLICATIONS, MADRAS-6

THE CLASSICAL DANCE POSES OF INDIA

BY

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NATANA NIKETAN
PUBLICATIONS
CATHEDRAL ROAD, MADRAS-6.

Price : Rs. 5.

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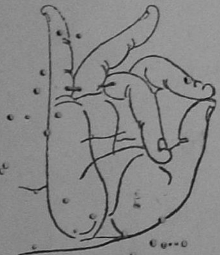
MUDRAS

(The Twenty four basic gestures)

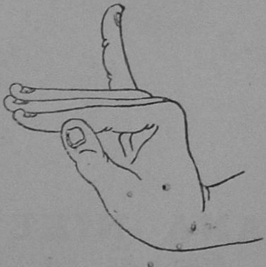
1. PATHĀKA

2. MUDRĀKHYA



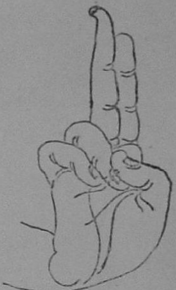
3. KATAKA

4. MUSHTI

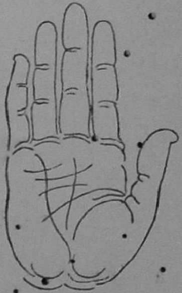


5. KARTHARĪMUKHA

6. SUKATHUNDA



7. KAPITTHA



8. HAMSAPAKSHA

FOREWORD

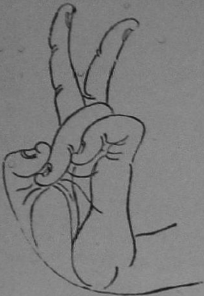
The cultural revival which we are witnessing to-day all over India is nowhere more demonstrably apparent than in the realm of Dance, and in particular that type of Dancing which has come to be known as Bharata Natyam. In a comprehensive sense Barata Natyam would include not only the Sadr nautch of the Tanjore School but also the Kathakali of Malabar. It is a well-known fact that Indian Dance has a language and grammar of its own quite unlike the dance types of the West. This book attempts to give an account of the basic patterns of body poses and movements both by way of description as well as by illustration. The name of Sri Gopinath which is associated with the book is well-known in and out side India as that of a leading exponent of the dance forms of South India. The publication will be found useful by those who practise the art. It will also serve to acquaint those who are not very familiar with the theoretical aspect of Indian Dance with the rudiments of its language and grammar.

9th May 1955

P. V. RAJAMANNAR.
Chief Justice, Madras.

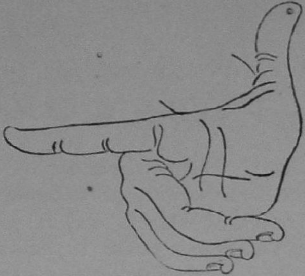
MUDRAS

(The Twenty four basic gestures)

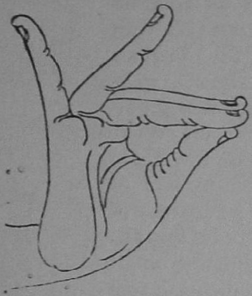


9. SIKHARA

14. BHRAMARA



12. ARDHACHANDRA

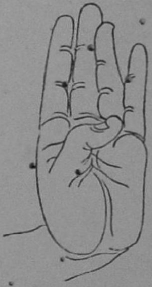


10. HAMSĀSYA

15. SŪCHĪMUKHA

11. ANJALI

13. MUKURA



16. PALLAVA

PRINTED AT THE SUNDAY TIMES PRESS, MADRAS-6.

PREFACE

From time immemorial Dancing has been one of the most fascinating fine arts. It is, in fact, a synthesis of several other Fine Arts, such as music, poetry, drama, painting and sculpture, combining, as it does, in itself the distinctive features of these arts—beauty, harmony, rhythm, melody and aesthetic expressions.

Dancing, like all other fine arts, is a natural vehicle for the spontaneous expression of human emotions; and this is best evidenced by the fact that it comes so natural and spontaneous even to little children, as they skip about in sheer joy, keeping time and making graceful gesticulation and rhythmic curves and movements.

Again, as in the case of other fine arts, there is an inborn instinct for dancing in man, and it is this latent instinct that has found expression and taken tangible shape as folk-dances all over the world.

Although the instinct for dancing is universal, the development of dance as a fine art has not been uniform in all countries; it has varied from country to country according to its geographical features, the culture and genius of its people. In India this art has attained such technical perfection and classical excellence which no other country has attained, and in this respect she remains unique and pre-eminent even to this day.

It may sometimes appear to a casual observer, that the very perfection in technique that dance has attained in India has made it rigid and static so much so the art has become stereotyped and mechanical; but a close study of the art would reveal that while the artist has to conform to certain set rules and conventions, the art, as it has developed, gives him free and full scope for the expression of his own individuality in consonance with its time-honoured technique.

Tradition ascribes a legendary origin to Indian dance and even goes to the extent of considering the art as the essence of the divinely inspired VEDAS, calling it 'The Fifth Veda.' But whatever be the

origin of Indian dance, there is no gainsaying the fact that the art has been from time immemorial an integral part of the cultural and religious life of the people, as is evidenced by the ritualistic sanctity that is often ascribed to it.

Legend says that Bharatamuni is the author of 'Bharata Natya Sastra', a masterly treatise on Dance, Music, Drama, etc. Everything pertaining to Dance has been described in detail in this monumental work. This work has been the authoritative basis on which the art has developed and subsequently flourished into several distinct Schools of Dancing in different parts of India from Assam down to Cape Comerin.

According to NATYA SASTRA there are three fundamental aspects of Indian dance, viz., NRITTA, NRITYA and NATYA. Of these NRITTA is dancing pure and simple, depending, as it does, mainly on TALA (time-measure). It essentially consists of foot-work with appropriate movements of ANGAS and UPANGAS and it is totally devoid of ABHINAYA (gesticulatory expression). NRITYA consists of gesticulations without language, and it is this that enables the audience to understand and follow the thoughts and emotions of the dancer without the medium of words. NRITYA, is, so to speak, a combination of BHAVA (emotional expression), RAGA (musical expression), and TALA (Time measure) and includes within its scope NRITTA also. NATYA is dramatic representation in which music, dance, emotional expression and speech are all brought to play and for this reason there is both NRITTA and NRITYA as parts of NATYA.

Indian Dance could be roughly divided into two types, viz., THANDAVA and LASYA. Of these THANDAVA consists of more virile and vigorous movements and is essentially masculine in character, more suitable for male dancers, suggesting as it does vitality and strength. The supreme example of this kind of dance is the SIVA THANDAVA which symbolises in itself the cosmic dance of destruction. In LASYA, on the other hand, the movements are softer and more measured, suggesting grace and beauty, and it is more suitable for female dancers.

ABHINAYA (gesticulatory expression) is the backbone of Indian Classical Dance; in fact, Indian Dance is incomplete without ABHINAYA. ABHINAYA is usually divided into four kinds: ANGIKA, VACHIKA, AHARYA, and SATVIKA.

ANGIKA ABHINAYA is expression of the BHAVA by using ANGAS, PRATYANGAS and UPANGAS, KARANAS and ANGAHARAS (body poses) and MUDRAS (gestures of the hand). Facial expressions too come under ABHINAYA. ANGIKA ABHINAYA is of three kinds: MUKHAJA (facial expressions), SARIRA (poses of the body such as KARANAS and ANGAHARAS), CHESTA (movements of ANGAS, UPANGAS and PRATYANGAS). ANGAS are head, hands, waist, chest, sides and legs. These are the main limbs of the body. UPANGAS are eyes, eye-brows, nose, lower-lip, chin and cheeks. The movements of the ANGAS and UPANGAS are described with minute details in the NATYA SASTRA. Hand gestures otherwise known as MUDRAS constitute a distinct language by themselves. There are twenty-four ASAMYUTA HASTAS (hand gestures or Mudras), thirteen SAMYUTA HASTAS, thirteen poses of the head (SIROBHEDA), thirty-six kinds of glances (DRISHTI BHEDA), seven movements of the eye-brows and a number of other movements of the ANGAS, UPANGAS and PRATYANGAS. By means of these ANGAS and UPANGAS, the dancer must express the full meaning of the speech, song or story. ABHINAYA of the face is the index of RASA (aesthetic emotion).

VACHIKA ABHINAYA is expression of the BHAVA by the song or speech, i.e., singing or speaking according to the situation and mood.

AHARYA ABHINAYA is expression of the mood with the aid of appropriate costumes, ornaments, make-up, etc., befitting the occasion of the story, song or speech and the status of the character the dancer portrays.

SATVIKA ABHINAYA is expression of the varying mental states that the characters are supposed to feel such as horripilation, tears etc. SATVIKA ABHINAYA is by far the most difficult part of ABHINAYA.

At present there are four types of popular classical dances now in vogue in India. They are KATHAKALI of Kerala, BHARATANATYAM of South India, MANIPURI of Assam and Bengal, and KATHAK of Northern India. All these four types of dances are distinct from one another in their movements and technique, though all of them have their origin in NATYA SASTRA.

KATHAKALI: KATHAKALI is a type of dance-drama that had its origin and is still in vogue in Kerala (the western coast of South

India). It is full of dance movements and combines in itself NRITTA, NRITYA and NATYA in a remarkable manner. In KATHAKALI dances are performed while depicting stories selected from Ramayana and Maha-Bharatha. KATHAKALI is one of the very few types of classical dances that have attained perfection in NRITTA, NRITYA, and NATYA, in all their aspects. KATHAKALI has got a peculiar type of make-up, which does not allow the dancer to open his mouth easily, so much so he has to express the varying emotions only through gestures, and facial expressions.

BHARATA NATYAM: BHARATA NATYAM is another type of classical dancing based on NATYA SASTRA, which is very popular in South India. It was formerly called 'DASIATTAM'. As it is performed today, it constitutes a number of items. BHARATA NATYAM was originally performed by 'DEVA DASIS', in temples and is particularly suitable for women. It combines in itself NRITTA and NRITYA in a large measure and NATYA to a lesser extent. This type of dance is usually performed by a single girl and she dances with suitable Abhinaya and movements to the time-measure kept by the NATTUVANAR (dance-tutor) and *adapting* to the time of the song sung by him, supported by a suitable orchestra. A BHARATA NATYAM performance begins with ALARIPPU, followed by JATISWARAM (both of Nritta type), SABDAM, VARNAM, PADAMS, and it usually closes with TILLANA which is dominated by NRITYA. Most of the songs for which Bharata Natyam is performed are in the Telugu language.

MANIPURI: MANIPURI dance is popular in Assam and Bengal. This is a graceful type of dance with soft movements of the ANGAS and PRATYANGAS. This is essentially a LASYA type of dance more suitable for women. MANIPURI dancers wear a gorgeous type of costume, which is very attractive.

KATHAK: KATHAK is a popular type of dance in Northern India. There is more of NRITTA than ABHINAYA in it as it is performed now. KATHAK is full of NRITTA especially foot-work and BHRAMARIS. TALA (time-measure) has reached perfection in this type of dance.

There are other types of classical dances also prevalent in India, but they are not so popular as those mentioned above. ANDHRA is

famous for some types of classical dances like the DEVADASI DANCE and KUCHIPUDI DANCE etc. The latter one derives its name from the village where it had started in Andhra. KUCHIPUDI is a dance-drama like KATHAKALI and has a good deal of vigorous dance movements.

Whatever may be the type of dance the dancer learns and performs on the stage, the ultimate goal or ideal the dancer has in view is RASOTPATTI (the rousing of aesthetic emotion) by which the dancer not only feels and expresses his various emotions but also make the audience feel the same emotions. The art of carrying away the audience along with him in whatever emotion he expresses through the medium of his dance is called RASOTPATTI. To arouse this feeling in the audience the dancer must attain a state of TADATMYAM, i. e., the dancer must himself get into the spirit of the character he portrays and of the BHAVA he expresses. Without practising constantly for a number of years, after attaining a thorough knowledge, it is indeed very difficult to attain this state of perfection, as in dance, unlike in drama every gesture is rigidly fixed by rules and conventions. The dancer is not allowed to deviate from the rules and conventions.

To attain this state of perfection one must learn under a competent teacher. Mere theoretical knowledge from books cannot help the pupil to master the art of dancing. The pupil should not be satisfied with taking lessons from a competent teacher and reproducing them blindly. Some poses of the body, some gestures and some expressions suit some people admirably, but the same may not be suitable for others if copied blindly. The dancer must adapt the technique to the shape of his own body and features. The dancer should not forget that the aim of dancing is to arouse aesthetic emotions more than anything else. First impressions are always best and everlasting. Exhibiting the dance one learns and practices, is the goal of a young dancer. In a dance performance the audience first witness the personality of the dancers before knowing about their ability to perform the dance properly and express the various emotions correctly. Along with the personality is watched the pose of the body. The pose of the body enhances the personality and is called. KARANA. The movement from one KARANA to another and several KARANAS constitute an ANGAHARA. KARANAS and ANGAHARAS are most important as

they give exquisite grace and beauty to the Dance and the Dancer. For this purpose particular attention has to be paid to the KARAṆAS (poses of the body) which form an important part of ANGIKA ABHINAYA, as has already been mentioned.

This book is a modest attempt to describe the KARANAS given in the NATYA SASTRA in detail, and to discuss their uses in the Art of Dancing. The usages given for Each Karana in this book do not fully express the meaning unless they are co-ordinated with proper movement of facial features and of the body. Each Karana is either the beginning or the ending of a usage given. It is fervently hoped that this book will be found useful and instructive to all those who are interested in Indian Dance.

GOPINATH
&
S. V. RAMANA RAO.

Natana Niketan,
Madras,
1955.

CLASSICAL DANCE POSES OF INDIA

1. SAMANAKHA

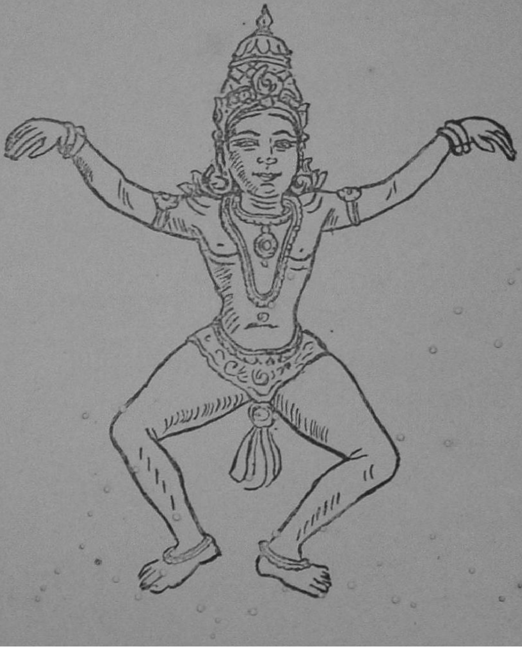
Usage: Before commencing the Dance, and Astonished or Stunned expression.

2. LĪNA

Usage: In prayer and Hindu salutation or greeting.

3. VISHKAMBA

Usage : Showing a woman's breasts, and showing separation (of lovers.)



4. KATICHINNA

Usage : Amusement and wonder.

5. ARDHA RĒCHITA

Usage: Looking at the Heroine with joy and before self-introduction.

6. GANḌA SŪCHI

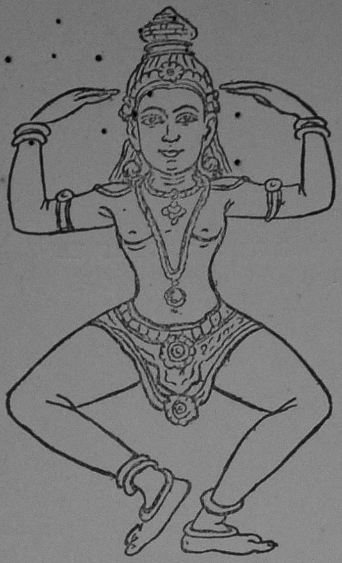
Usage: Requesting to hear and obediently standing.

7. AAVARTA

Usage : Showing KUBERA and saying excellent.

8. DŌLAPADA

Usage : Showing the movement of a cradle and showing 'Sudden Fear.'



9. GAJAKRĪDĪTA

Usage: Showing the Ears of an Elephant and showing the Crown.

10. DANDA RĒCHITA

Usage: Showing power and strength and showing the cobra bed of Lord Vishnu.

11. VRISHABHA KREEDITA

Usage : Showing the face and showing the hair and curls.

12. CHATURA

Usage: Showing the cobra on Lord Shiva's body and showing crook-edness.

13. BHUJANGĀNCHITA

Usage : Afraid of a cobra and showing horse-riding.

14. KARIHASTA

Usage : Showing an Elephant's Trunk and showing the length of hair.

15 PĀDĀPAVIDDHA

Usage: Showing a beetle (Bhramara) and showing separation.

16. GHŪRNITA

Usage: Showing 'For that purpose' and Thinking.

17. BHUJANGATRASTA RĒCHITA

Usage : Showing the Breeze, and showing 'Going with.'

18. VRISCHIKA RĒCHITA

Usage : Flying in the air and Swimming in the water.

19. NIKUTTA

Usage : Showing a boulder (Rock) and showing 'going back with fear.'

20. UDVRITTA

Usage : Showing 'Embracing a child' and showing the suckling of a baby.

21. VINIVRITTA.

Usage: Looking at the mountains and showing superiority.

22. UDGHATITA

Usage: Showing the heaviness of the breasts, and showing affection.

23. NĀGĀPĀSARPITA

Usage : Showing the movements of a Cobra; and Looking at a DEN.

24. UPASRITA

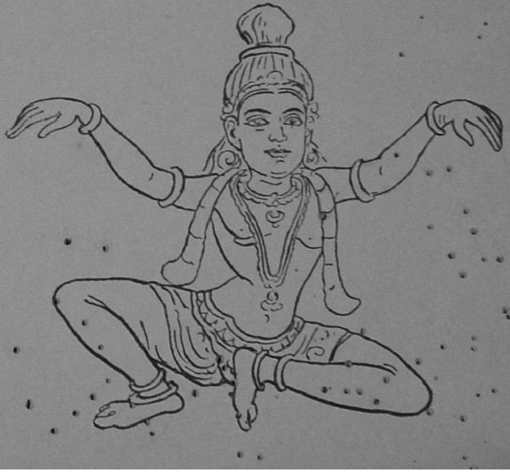
Usage : Counting the beads in Prayer and showing a BUD.

25. SWASTIKA RĒCHITA

Usage : Waiting and Mocking.

26. VIVRITTA

Usage : Showing a bed of flowers, and used when 'Pacifying.'



27. PARIVRITTA

Usage : Showing a flower and used when saying 'a little.'

28. GARUDAPLUTA

Usage : Showing the 'Kite', and used when saying 'flying like a kite.'

29. ARDHAMATTALI

Usage : Challenging the opponent, and Ready to defend.

30. TALASAMSPHŌTITA

Usage : A famous pose of Lord Siva, and Right hand showing blessing and the left hand offering protection.

31. NŪPURA

Usage: Showing the sound of anklets and showing tying of feet.

32. KATISAMA

Usage: Waiting and looking with contempt.

33. TALASANGHATITA

Usage : Holding cymbals and showing sympathy.

34. UNMATTA

Usage : Showing Boastfulness, and showing the branches of a tree.

35. MADASKHALITA

Usage: Showing excessive passion, and Reeling with intoxication.

36. JANITA

Usage: Showing Majestic walk and look and Majestic Exit.

37. NIVĒSA

Usage: Showing the testing of Veena (stringed musical instrument), and Hero waiting for the Heroine.

38. SKHALITA

Usage: Showing a horse, and showing the Lord of Cobras.

39. ŪRDHVAJĀNU

Usage: A pose of Lord Krishna's 'Kalinga Mardana,' and listening with impatience.

40. SIMHĀKARSHITA

Usage: Showing 'Fright', and requesting for mercy.

41. GRIDHRĀVALĪNAKA

Usage: Used when saying 'Go', 'Please Go', and saying 'Once upon a time.'

42. VIDYUDBHRĀNTA

Usage: Remembering, and sying 'No.'

43. APAKRĀNTA

Usage: Holding a flower garland, and showing 'Pearls'.

44. LALITA

Usage: Showing curls on the forehead, and showing she combing of the hair

45. SŪCHIVIDDHA

Usage: Showing 'Beatiful' and asking to Wait.

46. BHRAMARA

Usage: Showing the chest decorated with Pearls, and saying 'My Darling', and showing a 'Beetle' (Bhramara)

47. KUNCHITA

Usage: Showing 'Reverence', and showing the 'Stomach', and holding cymbals and dancing.

48. MATTALI

Usage: Showing the passion of a youthful woman and Looking at the heroine with passion.

49. PARASARPITA

Usage: Looking with affection and saying 'What about me'.

50. ŪRŪDVRITTA

Usage: Saying 'I am at your service', or 'I am your slave', and expressing Regret or Repentence.

51. KATIBHRĀNTA

Usage: Saying 'Like the Moon', and asking 'Is it for me'.

52. VYAMSITA

Usage: 'Fondling a child', showing 'Taken Aback', Showing 'Surprise'.

53. PRISTASWASTIKA

Usage: Mediation and Prayer.

54. DIKSWASTIKA

Usage: Showing 'Indifference', showing 'wounded pride'.

55. VYAŚAKHARECHITA

Usage: Showing Fearful doubt, and showing 8 (eight).

56. ARGALA

Usage: Showing 'Barred' and showing Resting.

57. CHHINNA

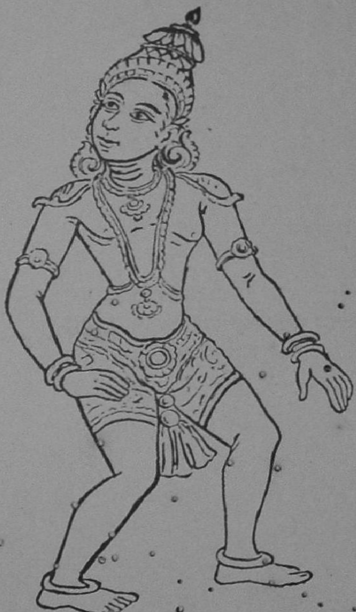
Usage : Expressing a perplexing situation, and Looking with sympathy.

58. MANDALASWASTIKA

Usage : Showing 'surrounded by', Showing 'Relations'.

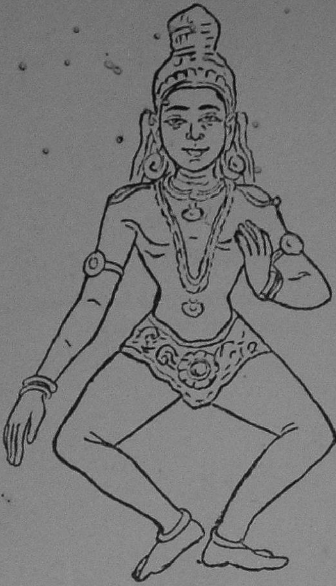
59. NIKUNCHITA

Usage: Showing a 'Monkey', and showing a lame, disabled or old person.



60. PĀRSVAJĀNU

Usage: Turning back and questioning while going away, and Ready to defend.

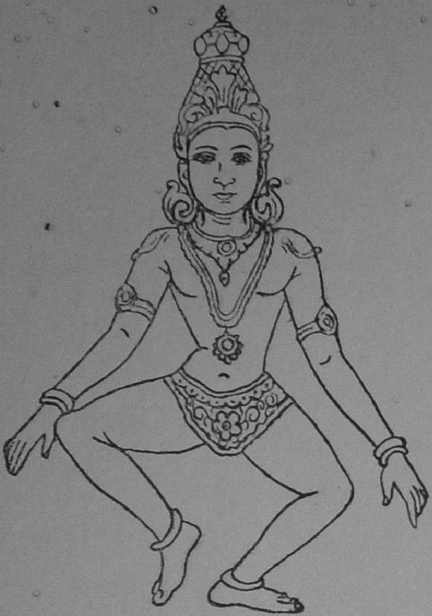


61. AKSHIPTA

Usage: Looking around with dignity and showing a king sitting on a throne.

62. VIVARTITA

Usage: Saying haughtily 'I will go' and showing 'There'.



63. ALĀTA

Usage: Showing 'Valour', and Reeling with 'Rage' or 'Passion'.

64. KRĀNTA

Usage: Showing 'Is that all', and 'No, not for me'.

65. LOLITA

Usage: Asking 'what about me', and showing the body.

66. ARDHANIKUTTA

Usage: Showing 'Pleasure', Praising one's self (self adoration).

67. VIKSHIPTA

Usage: Waiting for an order and obediently listening.

68. TALAVILĀSITA

Usage: Throwing away, and Showing a Swinging movement.

69. VRISCHIKA

Usage: Showing a 'Scorpion', and Hearing an unpleasant sound.

70. DANDAPĀDA

Usage: Showing the path and offering water to God in a conch.

71. DANDAPAKSHA

Usage: Showing Majesty, and Dignity, and Showing Arroganace.

72. VALITŌRU

Usage: Asking for help and protection and sying 'I am at your service'.

73. VĪKSHIPTĀKSHIPTA

Usage: 'Thinking' and showing a 'Deer' (animal)

74. VARTITA

Usage: Showing helplessness and Dejection and saying 'This is the result' or 'It happened like this'.

75. RĒCHITANIKUTTA

Usage: About to go and saying 'You may go'.

76. LATĀVRISCHIKA

Usage: Dropping to the earth and showing the Jumping of birds.

77. SWASTIKA

Usage: Thinking of a Plan and Saying 'Please do it'.

78. BHUJANGĀTRĀSITA

Usage: Showing fear from seeing a cobra, and a pose of Nataraja (Lord Siva)

79. APAVIDDHA

Usage : Showing Envy, and saying 'If'.

80. ARDHASŪCHI

Usage : Showing Tender leaves, and showing coolness which gives happiness.

81. SŪCHI

Usage: Stamping the earth in rage and asking to go away.

82. URŌMANDALA

Usage. Showing 'Helplessness', and Showing 'Misery'.

83. PĀRSVAKRĀNTA

Usage: Showing 'Fighting mood' and asking for 'Explanation'.

84. ARDHASWASTIKA

Usage: 'Explaining' and saying 'What can I do'.

85. SANNATA

Usage: Showing 'Bhramaris' or circling about and showing the movements of Birds.

86. NITAMBA

Usage: Showing 'childhood', and showing sorrow, pity or sympathy.

87. SAMBHRANTA

Usage: Showing 'Bewilderment' and showing 'weariness'.

88. ANCHITA

Usage: Offering shelter and showing a dance pose of Nataraja.

89. TALAPUSHPAPUTA

Usage : Showing dropping flowers and saying 'at this moment' and 'to-day', and showing 'Here'.

90. AKSHIPTARECHITA

Usage: Saying 'Accordingly', Showing a 'Hare' (animal).

91. VALITA

Usage: Blessing and showing Lord 'Subrahmanya' (a pose)

92. VAKSHASWASTIKA

Usage: Prayer and Meditation and showing 'Bound hand and foot'.

93. NISUMBHITA

Usage: A difficult dance pose in Siva's Tandava of Destruction, and showing Earth and Heaven.

94. ĒLAKĀKRĪDITA

Usage: Refusing to give in a playful, mood, and offering flowers in worship of God.

95. PĀRSVANIKUTTA

Usage: Spreading flowers and showing a lotus leaf.

96. VRISCHIKAKUTTITA

Usage: Hearing a fearful sound and showing 'an unbearable sight'.

97. SIMHAVIKRIDITA

Usage: Showing the monkey king, and Showing a Lion about to jump.

98. HARINAPLUTA

Usage: Showing the Ears of an Elephant and showing jumping of a DEER.

99. PRENKHŌLITA

Usage : Showing the head of an Elephant, and sitting on a horse.

100. SARPITA

Usage : Showing 'Satisfaction', looking passionately.

101. MAYŪRALITA

Usage: Showing the movement of a Peacock, and showing the combing of hair.

102. GANGĀVATARANA

Usage: Used in the exercises of the body.

103. CHAKRAMANDALA

Usage: Used in the exercises of the body.

104. ATIKRĀNTA

Usage: Used in the exercise of the body.

105. SAKATĀSYA

Usage: Used in the exercise of the body.

MUDRAS

(The Twenty four basic gestures)

17. THRIPATHĀKA

20. VARDHAMĀNAKA

22. ŪRNANABHA

18. MRGASĪRSHA

23. MUKULA

19. SA[illegible]IRAS

21. ARĀLA

24. KATAKAMUKHA

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